DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 972 HE 010 422

AUTHOR	Eggert, John D.
TITLE	Characteristics of SUN Learners (First Three Offerings). Statistical Summary No. 2.
INSTITUTION	University of Mid-America, Lincoln, Nebr.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Oct 75
CONTRACT	NIE-G-75-001
NOTE	45p.; For related documents see HE 010 410 - HE 010 428
AVAILABLE FROM	Office of Public Affairs and Information Services, University of Mid-America, Box 82006, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Adult Students; Educational Television; Higher Education; Institutional Research; *Nontraditional Students; *Open Education; Research Projects; Statistical Data; *Student Characteristics; *Telecourses
IDENTIFIERS	*State University of Nebraska; University of Mid America NE

ABSTRACT

This statistical summary describes learners enrolled in the first three offerings of the State University of Nebraska (SUN), with the data broken down on the third offering only. SUN, a project of the University of Nebraska, is a nontraditional, open learning program designed to extend postsecondary educational opportunities to persons who find it difficult to access traditional campus-based programs. The courses included in this report are: Accounting I, Introductory Psychology, Making It Count (Computers), Consumer Experience, Freehand Sketching, Learning Disabilities, Classic Theatre, and The American Economy. Data on SUN students come from registration forms and the Student Information Questionnaire. It is found that the learners enrolled in SUN tend to be similar across all three offerings. Seventy-seven percent were women, 79 percent were married, 41 percent had mostly young children, and 23 percent were homemakers. The median income was approximately $11,000. Fifty-two percent have had at least one year of college, and 53 percent have had a formal education experience during the five years previous to enrollment, not including the 12 percent of those enrolled in the second and third offerings who previously enrolled in SUN. Learners come from farms, small towns, and cities roughly in proportion to the distribution of the Nebraska population. Statistical data on enrolled learners are given in tabular form with short commentaries. (LBH)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF SUN LEARNERS

(First Three Offerings)

Statistical Summary No. 2

Office of
Research and Planning

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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HE 010422

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University of Mid-America

October, 1975

This report was prepared pursuant to Grant #NIE-G-75-001 from the National Institute of Education to the University of Mid-America. This report does not necessarily represent the view of that agency.

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STATISTICAL SUMMARY

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNERS ENROLLED
IN THE FIRST THREE OFFERINGS
OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

This statistical summary describes learners enrolled in the first three offerings of the State University of Nebraska. The data is broken down by course for the third offering only. Course data for the first two offerings has been previously reported (Statistical Summary--Characteristics of Learners, September, 1975). SUN a project of the University of Nebraska, is a nontraditional, open learning program designed to extend postsecondary educational opportunities to persons who find it difficult to access traditional campus-based programs. SUN is one of five state programs currently affiliated with the University of Mid-America (UMA). UMA is a regional consortium of the Universities of Nebraska, Iowa State, Missouri, Kansas and Kansas State, and serves these institutions through three sets of activities: the acquisition and development of courseware for delivery in open learning programs; the planning, development and coordination of systems for the delivery of open learning; and, research and evaluation which helps inform the development of open learning programs. As of Summer 1975, SUN was the sole operational delivery system in the UMA consortium.

This report consists of four sections. The first section provides an overview of the courses included in this report. The second section outlines the sources of the statistical data in this report. The third

section contains a summary of the findings. The fourth section contains statistical data on enrolled learners, in tabular form with short commentaries.

Overview of Courses

To date, SUN has offered eight courses: Accounting I, Introductory Psychology, Making It Count (Computers), Consumer Experience, Freehand Sketching, Learning Disabilities, Classic Theatre, and The American Economy. The accounting and psychology courses were the only courses presented the first offering, and the same two courses were presented the second offering along with the computer and consumerism courses. All eight courses were presented the third offering.

Accounting I was developed entirely by UMA. It is a multimedia course consisting of a textbook, a study guide, fifteen 30-minute programs, sixteen 30-minute audio tapes, and sixteen newspaper articles. Television programs were available through weekly statewide ETV broadcasts or through video cassettes at one of the four SUN learning centers across the state. Newspaper articles appeared in the Sunday edition of the major statewide newspaper. Typically, for each topic of instruction the enrollees were provided with a brief newspaper article, an assigned textbook section, assigned sections in the study guide, an audio tape, and a television program.

Introductory Psychology was acquired from Communication Research Machines (CRM) and the University of California at San Diego, and adapted by UMA for use in the SUN delivery system. Introductory Psychology included 15 units of instruction. Each unit consisted of a set of objectives,

a reading assignment from the text, a 30-minute television program broadcast over the ETV network, and a weekly newspaper article. A study guide was also provided, designed to help students coordinate their use of the various media. In addition, the study guide contained for each unit a self-check quiz, a list of optional readings, and a description of voluntary learning projects. "Trial tests" were included in the course as a device to help the student assess his or her state of preparation for the graded exam.

Making It Count was acquired from Boeing Computer Services, Inc., and was presented by SUN with no alterations except for some modifications and additions to the tests, and the addition of a weekly newspaper article. The course was designed to be viewed by a diverse audience for college credit at the sophomore level. It assumes no previous knowledge of computers or computer related subjects. Making It Count consisted of twenty 30-minute television programs broadcast over a period of ten weeks. The SUN learners were also provided with a text, a two-volume student manual and the newspaper component.

The Consumer Experience was designed and produced by two faculty members at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. UMA acquired the course and offered it intact through SUN, with the addition of a UMA-produced newspaper component. The course consists of thirty 30-minute television programs, two tests, a student learning guide, and a newspaper overview of each week's lesson.

The above four courses have been acquired by UMA for use by its delivery systems. The remaining four courses have not been acquired by UMA, but have been used by the SUN delivery system only. The American

Economy introduces the contemporary American economic system in a practical rather than a theoretical emphasis, utilizing a wide variety of case histories and situations of national importance, according to the SUN brochure. It is offered for three credits, and consists of thirty 30-minute television broadcasts.

The "Characteristics of Learning Disabilities" course is to acquaint teachers, school administrators, parents, and others with characteristics of children with learning disabilities. The course is available for graduate or undergraduate credit through the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) or the four state colleges. Persons desiring graduate credit are required to attend seminars in various parts of the state. The television component consists of fifteen 30-minute programs.

"Classic Theater: The Humanities in Drama," includes plays from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries produced by the British Broadcasting Company. Each play is accompanied by a 30-minute interview and discussion of the play with one or more of the actors in the play. The course has been offered for three credits, and 13 plays lasting approximately 1½ hours each are broadcast.

"Freehand Sketching" is a beginning course for persons with little or no previous experience. Learners are supplied with a textbook and an instructional kit. Evaluations of drawings are provided by a SUN faculty consultant. The television component consists of thirty 30-minute programs. No college credit is given for participation in the course.

Sources of Information

There are two primary sources of information about the characteristics of SUN students: the registration form, and the Student Information

Questionnaire (SIQ). The registration form is filled out once each offering by each learner. It contains very basic demographic data, such as age and sex, as well as certain administrative data. The SIQ is an extensive five-page questionnaire which was filled out and returned on a voluntary basis by 58% of the learners, covering general information, previous education, work experience, use of leisure time, resources available for study, student goals, and public relations information. This report presents the information of most general interest from these forms. The information based on the registration forms can be taken as quite an accurate portrayal of SUN's students, since such data was available on virtually all of SUN's learners. The information from the SIQ's must be viewed with some caution in that not all learners returned these forms. While preliminary analysis indicates that those who returned the questionnaire were no different than those who did not in terms of most of the variables on the registration form, it does appear that a slightly greater proportion of women than men filled out and returned their SIQ's. There may be other undiscovered biases. Nevertheless, given a 58% return, the thirteen tables presented herein should provide a fairly accurate picture of our present learners.

Summary of Findings

The learners who enrolled in SUN tended to be similar across all three offerings, with some exceptions. The second offering had a lesser proportion of women than did the first and third offerings (63% versus 77% and 83%). The third offering had a greater proportion of persons with "mostly young children", while there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of SUN's learners who have identified themselves as "homemakers".

There are also differences between courses of the third offering, with respect to student characteristics. Freehand Sketching had the greatest proportion of older learners, Psychology the youngest. Learning Disabilities attracted a greater proportion of persons with previous college experience than the other courses. Those enrolled in Freehand Sketching had the lowest proportion of learners who hoped for some academic degree.

Over all offerings the approximate median age of SUN learners was 37. Seventy-seven percent were women, 79% were married, 41% had mostly young children, and 23% identified themselves as homemakers. The median income was approximately $11,000. Fifty-two percent have had at least one year of college, and 53% have had a formal education experience during the five years previous to enrollment, not including the 12% of those enrolled in the second and third offerings who previously enrolled in SUN.

Learners come from farms, small towns, and cities roughly in proportion to the distribution of the Nebraska population. Sixty-three percent of all learners hope for some academic degree. "Career improvement goals" were selected most often as being the "most important", followed by "personal satisfaction" goals. The greatest concern SUN learners had before starting their course work was with "academic and learning problems".

Table 1A. Median Age of SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1853	First Offering N=617	Second Offering N=343	Third Offering N=893
Approximate Median Age	37	40	33	36

Source: Registration Forms

Table 1B. Median Age of SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=112	Psychology N=94	Computers N=58	Consumerism N=37	Freehand Sketching N=246	American Economics N=50	Classic Theatre N=42	Learning Disabilities N=352
Approximate Median Age	34	29	35	34	47	32	31	36

Source: Registration Forms

Comment: Freehand Sketching attracted the greatest proportion of older learners; Psychology the youngest.

Table 2A. Distribution of Sexes of SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1856	First Offering N=617	Second Offering N=345	Third Offering N=894
Male	23%	23%	37%	17%
Female	77%	77%	63%	83%

Source: Registration Forms

Comment: The second offering had a significantly greater proportion of males than the first and third offerings.

Table 2B. Distribution of Sexes of SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=112	Psychology N=94	Computers N=58	Consumerism N=37	Freehand Sketching N=248	American Economy N=50	Classic Theatre N=42	Learning Disabilities N=352
Male	26%	19%	34%	13%	21%	24%	9%	8%
Female	73%	80%	65%	86%	78%	76%	90%	91%

Source: Registration Forms

Comment: There was a wide variation among courses with respect to sex.

Table 3A. Marital Status of SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1111	First Offering N=336	Second Offering N=208	Third Offering N=537
Married	79%	82%	74%	78%
Single	13%	11%	16%	12.5%
Widowed, Divorced, etc.	8%	6%	10%	9.1%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Table 3B. Marital Status of SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=83	Psychology N=59	Computers N=34	Consumerism N=30	Freehand Sketching N=130	American Economy N=37	Classic Theatre N=26	Learning Disabilities N=211
Married	80%	59%	71%	77%	74%	89%	65%	87%
Single	12%	25%	12%	7%	14%	5%	23%	9%
Widowed, Divorced, etc.	8%	15%	18%	17%	12%	5%	12%	5%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Table 4A. Family Status of SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=962	First Offering N=325	Second Offering N=179	Third Offering N=458
No Children	16%	16%	21%	15%
Mostly Young Children	41%	36%	30%	50%
Mostly Grown Children	41%	46%	49%	35%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: The third offering attracted relatively more persons with mostly younger children.

Table 4B. Family Status of SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=73	Psychology N=47	Computers N=31	Consumerism N=26	Freehand Sketching N=107	American Economy N=33	Classic Theatre N=18	Learning Disabilities N=184
No Children	14%	13%	23%	4%	12%	12%	17%	17%
Mostly Young Children	62%	57%	52%	69%	36%	55%	56%	53%
Mostly Grown Children	25%	30%	26%	27%	51%	33%	28%	30%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Consumerism had the greatest proportion of learners with mostly young children; Freehand Sketching the least.

Table 5A. Annual Income From All Sources, Before Taxes, As Reported By SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=974	First Offering N=321	Second Offering N=183	Third Offering N=470
Less than $1,000	7%	9%	3%	7%
1,001-4,000	7%	6%	13%	6%
4,001-7,000	12%	9%	15%	12%
7,001-10,000	19%	18%	18%	20%
10,001-15,000	23%	24%	26%	23%
15,001-20,000	15%	17%	14%	16%
20,001-30,000	9%	9%	7%	9%
30,001-40,000	3%	4%	2%	3%
40,000 +	3%	4%	2%	4%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: The median income has remained fairly stable across offerings at approximately $11,000.

Table 5B. Annual Income From All Sources, Before Taxes, As Reported by SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=78	Psychology N=49	Computer N=32	Consumerism N=25	Freehand Sketching N=104	American Economy N=35	Classic Theatre N=24	Learning Disabilities N=186
Less than $1,000	9%	10%	6%	0%	7%	9%	13%	5%
1,001-4,000	8%	2%	9%	4%	6%	6%	8%	5%
4,001-7,000	15%	20%	6%	20%	12%	6%	21%	10%
7,001-10,000	24%	22%	28%	32%	14%	34%	4%	19%
10,001-15,000	21%	29%	28%	20%	18%	17%	21%	27%
15,001-20,000	13%	4%	13%	16%	19%	23%	17%	16%
20,001-30,000	6%	8%	9%	0%	13%	3%	8%	10%
30,001-40,000	1%	2%	0%	0%	3%	3%	8%	4%
40,000+	3%	2%	0%	8%	9%	0%	0%	3%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Table 6A. Size of Town Resided in by SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1096	First Offering N=363	Second Offering N=202	Third Offering N=531
Farm or Ranch	21%	22%	18%	21%
Under 2,000	15%	17%	12%	15%
2,000-10,000	16%	15%	13%	18%
10,000-50,000	13%	9%	20%	15%
Over 50,000	34%	36%	37%	32%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: The distribution of learners among various sized towns very closely approximates the distribution of the total Nebraska population.

Table 6B. Size of Town Resided in by SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=82	Psychology N=58	Computer N=34	Consumerism N=30	Freehand Sketching N=127	American Economy N=37	Classic Theatre N=26	Learning Disabilities N=208
Farm or Ranch	22%	24%	15%	30%	23%	27%	19%	21%
Under 2,000	5%	13%	9%	3%	9%	13%	19%	21%
2,000-10,000	23%	17%	23%	13%	18%	13%	15%	17%
10,000-50,000	19%	17%	11%	13%	19%	13%	0%	12%
Over 50,000	31%	28%	41%	40%	31%	32%	46%	28%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Classic Theatre attracted the largest proportion of persons from the larger cities.

Table 7A. Percentage of Persons Identifying Themselves as "Homemakers" among SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1829	First Offering N=617	Second Offering N=343	Third Offering N=869
Homemakers	23%	36%	23%	13%

Source: Registration Forms

Comment: A fairly wide variation exists across offerings with respect to proportions of persons identifying themselves as homemakers.

Table 7B. Percentage of Persons Identifying Themselves as "Homemakers" among SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=102	Psychology N=94	Computers N=58	Consumerism N=37	Freehand Sketching N=248	American Economy N=50	Classic Theatre N=42	Learning Disabilities N=353
Homemakers	14%	14%	6%	18%	19%	16%	16%	11%

Source: Registration Forms

Table 8A. Highest Level of Education Completed by SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1105	First Offering N=364	Second Offering N=206	Third Offering N=535
Less than High School	3%	5%	2%	3%
High School	33%	43%	35%	25%
Trade or Business School	10%	14%	12%	7%
1-3 Years College	25%	27%	29%	23%
College Graduate (4 years)	15%	6%	13%	21%
Graduate Study	12%	4%	8%	20%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Table 8B. Highest Level of Education Completed by SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=83	Psychology N=58	Computers N=34	Consumerism N=30	Freehand Sketching N=129	American Economics N=37	Classic Theatre N=26	Learning Disabilities N=211
Less than High School	0%	7%	3%	0%	7%	5%	0%	1%
High School	42%	71%	35%	30%	29%	32%	31%	10%
Trade or Business School	9%	3%	15%	10%	7%	13%	0%	2%
1-3 Years College	25%	10%	29%	50%	26%	35%	39%	19%
College Graduate (4 Years)	16%	3%	3%	7%	14%	8%	15%	33%
Graduate Study	7%	5%	15%	3%	16%	5%	15%	33%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Learning disabilities offered for undergraduate and graduate credit had the highest percentage of persons with college degrees.

Table 9A. Responses of SUN Learners to the Question: "How many years has it been since you last participated in a formal educational experience?"

	Total All Offerings N=1083	First Offering N=356	Second Offering N=203	Third Offering N=524
Within past year	25%	15%	24%	33%
Between 1-2 years ago	13%	10%	12%	15%
Between 3-5 years ago	14%	12%	17%	15%
5 or more years ago	47%	63%	47%	37%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Roughly half of all SUN learners have had no formal educational experiences during the five years preceeding their enrollment, excluding previous enrollment in SUN.

Table 9B. Responses of SUN Learners to the Question: "How many years has it been since you last participated in a formal educational experience?"

Third Offering

	Accounting N=83	Psychology N=57	Computer N=33	Consumerism N=28	Freehand Sketching N=126	American Economics N=35	Classic Theatre N=26	Learning Disabilities N=207
Within past year	23%	28%	33%	25%	26%	34%	31%	43%
Between 1-2 years ago	15%	12%	3%	21%	11%	9%	19%	19%
Between 3-5 years ago	13%	15%	12%	7%	15%	17%	11%	15%
5 or more years ago	49%	44%	51%	46%	47%	40%	39%	23%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Learning Disabilities had the largest proportion of learners with recent formal educational experiences.

Table 10A. Percent of Students Previously Enrolled in SUN

	TOTAL Second and Third Offering N=1189	Second Offering N=340	Third Offering N=849
Percent of students previously enrolled in SUN	12%	13%	11%

Source: Registration Forms

Table 10B. Percent of Students Previously Enrolled in SUN
Third Offering

	Accounting N=104	Psychology N=90	Computers N=54	Consumerism N=30	Freehand Sketching N=237	American Economy N=48	Classic Theatre N=40	Learning Disabilities N=332
Percent of students previously enrolled in SUN	9%	7%	24%	37%	11%	41%	35%	4%

Source: Registration Forms

Comment: The low re-enrollment into Accounting and Psychology are largely due to the fact that these two courses were offered in both previous offerings.

Table 11A. Responses of SUN Learners to the Question: "What is the highest degree you hope to obtain?"

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1112	First Offering N=367	Second Offering N=208	Third Offering N=537
None	37%	38%	34%	37%
Associate Degree or equivalent	8%	11%	11%	5%
Bachelor's Degree	25%	30%	31%	21%
Some other Degree	29%	21%	24%	36%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Roughly two-thirds of all SUN learners hope to obtain some academic degree.

Table 11B. Reponses of SUN Learners to the Question: "What is the highest degree you hope to obtain?"
Third Offering

	Accounting N=83	Psychology N=59	Computers N=34	Consumerism N=30	Freehand Sketching N=130	American Economy N=37	Classic Theatre N=26	Learning Disabilities N=211
None	43%	32%	44%	27%	70%	5%	31%	19%
Associate Degree or equivalent	3%	10%	5%	10%	5%	11%	7%	3%
Bachelor's Degree	27%	32%	24%	47%	11%	57%	15%	19%
Some other Degree	27%	25%	26%	17%	13%	27%	46%	57%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Degree aspirations are lowest among the Freehand Sketching learners, greatest among those enrolled in American Economy.

Table 12A. Distribution of Selection of Three Types of Goals as being most important to SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=1112	First Offering N=367	Second Offering N=208	Third Offering N=537
Career Improvement Goals	43%	40%	50%	43%
Personal Satisfaction	31%	34%	23%	33%
Cultural Growth and Development Goals	8%	13%	6%	6%
Other, or no Response	18%	13%	21%	18%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Table 12B. Distribution of Selection of Three Types of Goals as being most important to SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=83	Psychology N=59	Computers N=34	Consumerism N=30	Freehand Sketching N=130	American Economy N=37	Classic Theatre N=26	Learning Disabilities N=211
Career Improvement Goals	63%	45%	61%	37%	15%	37%	23%	56%
Personal Satisfaction	24%	33%	21%	23%	59%	41%	46%	21%
Cultural Growth and Development Goals	3%	7%	9%	10%	11%	5%	7%	3%
Other, or no Response	10%	15%	9%	30%	15%	17%	24%	20%

Table 13A. The "Greatest Concern" Most Frequently Cited by SUN Learners

	TOTAL All Offerings N=725	First Offering N=276	Second Offering N=118	Third Offering N=331
Academic and learning problems	19%	20%	24%	16%
Program pace, keeping up with SUN schedule	11%	14%	7%	11%
Lack of time and energy	9%	12%	5%	9%
Self discipline: getting down to regular work	11%	8%	14%	14%
Domestic interruptions and demands	5%	2%	7%	7%
Work pressures and responsibilities	7%	5%	10%	7%
Other, or no response	38%	39%	33%	36%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire

Comment: Academic learning problems, and problems related to management and availability of time were the most frequently cited goals.

Table 13B. The "Greatest Concern" Most Frequently Cited by SUN Learners
Third Offering

	Accounting N=54	Psychology N=45	Computers N=20	Consumerism N=16	Freehand Sketching N=69	American Economy N=24	Classic Theatre N=17	Learning Disabilities N=133
Academic and learning problems	22%	22%	25%	13%	13%	29%	6%	11%
Program pace, keeping up with SUN schedule	13%	4%	5%	6%	21%	8%	11%	8%
Lack of time and energy	6%	7%	10%	6%	7%	8%	23%	11%
Self discipline: getting down to regular work	5%	24%	15%	25%	17%	17%	5%	13%
Domestic interruptions and demands	7%	4%	5%	0%	5%	13%	5%	9%
Work pressures and responsibilities	3%	4%	0%	6%	3%	8%	5%	13%
Other, or no response	44%	35%	40%	44%	34%	17%	45%	35%

Source: Student Information Questionnaire